

SCOTT COHEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Scott, I wonder if you'd give me a little of your background, where you were educated and your military experience before we get you into government work.

COHEN: I was born in Boston, and the first significant thing in my life was when Tom Yawkey bought the Red Sox in 1953, and my family's allegiance moved from the Braves to the Red Sox. I've suffered ever since.

I went to Boston University, graduated in history and served in World War II in India and China as an Army news correspondent. At the end of the war, I returned from Kunming to Calcutta and wrote the history of the Calcutta base section for the India-Burma theater history.

Following the war, I returned to college for a year to complete my degree, then went to Harvard for a semester in the School of Government studying Far Eastern history. One of my professors, Bruce Harper, a former Foreign Service officer, was outstanding. I took five weeks off in the summer of '49 to go on active duty at the Boston Army Base to write what they called The Unofficial History of the New England Military District. Then I went to work for FBIS in September '49.

Q: FBIS is what?

COHEN: Foreign Broadcast Information Service. In September '49.

Q: What is the basic function of FBIS?

COHEN: The Foreign Broadcast Information Service is a radio and press monitoring arm of the United States Government which operates in several foreign countries and has a couple of monitoring bases in the United States as well. It provides a daily report to the intelligence community and also an unclassified report which is made available to the press and the general public. The only reason for classification of any of this is that they intercept the transmissions of the international news agencies: API, Reuter's, Xinhua, and so forth. Those have to be classified for copyright reasons, not for security reasons.

Q: You came into the FBIS in 1949. I would like to focus on your experience. You went to Saigon in 1951.

COHEN: Yes, I arrived there the first week of February 1951 to complete a negotiation with the French High Command and the Vietnamese Army for a joint radio monitoring operation out of a suburb of Saigon. That was quickly concluded, and I think we were reporting as soon as the second or third week, maybe the third week in February 1951, by radio teletype to Washington.

Q: What was your impression of Saigon? This was '51. What was the situation there?

COHEN: Saigon then was a beautiful French provincial town with an educated middle class, a very attractive people, who, to a large extent, were fascinated with the French way of life and adopted much of French style and culture. Next to Saigon was the city of Cholon with half a million Chinese who maintained their own culture and seemed less interested in French culture.

The political situation, it was the time of the Bao Dai experiment when Bao Dai was named emperor of Vietnam, largely due to American pressure on the French to establish some Vietnamese government that had a semblance of credibility and integrity. But, in fact, he was a puppet of the French. And in his ministries, there were installed Vietnamese at the top level and beside them French advisors, who, to a great extent, ran those ministries. They had more experience, but that's not why they were running them. They were running them because France was in charge. It was called the Union of Associated States of Indochina, which included Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. There was clear French control, and the French were also training, under Bao Dai, a Vietnamese army of indifferent quality.

Q: If you had to deal with any problems, did you go to the Vietnamese or to the French?

COHEN: I had counterparts in the monitoring business, a French commandant whose name was Besnier, a very impressive man in the French High Command-I guess that's the rank of major in our army-and a Vietnamese colonel representing the Vietnamese Army. I had the smoothest of relations with them. And when there were difficulties, I could meet with them and resolve the difficulties very easily. We had a similar goal: to find out what the dissident radio stations were broadcasting. And there were many. It wasn't just the Viet Minh at that time. Even the Cao Dai had a radio station.

Q: Cao Dai being sort of a religious sect, weren't they?

COHEN: A religious and political sect. I knew their Pope who had a spiritual bent and an army of ten thousand, a very interesting man, and some day I'd like to tell the story of the Cao Dai. I got to know him on a very personal basis and went to Tay-Ninh, his capital, forty miles from Saigon, many times. But there was also a Buddhist sect with a radio station. I suppose, at any given time, there were about ten to fifteen different authorities broadcasting in Vietnam, and what they were saying was important to us.

Q: Were we only listening there to monitor them, or were we using it also as a monitoring station for other areas, too?

COHEN: We were interested only in Indochina. There was a larger monitoring station in the Pacific which listened to China.

Q: I see. You came back to Washington in 1952?

COHEN: I arrived back in January 1953.

Q: Do you want to go into what you were doing?

COHEN: If it's of any interest.

Q: Yes.

COHEN: Not so significant. I was made editor of three regional daily reports of radio broadcasting. I think it was Near East and North Africa, Latin America, and Western Europe.

Q: This is also a prelude to what you were doing later, but the point being that you had really extensive experience from the military and from your FBIS work in foreign affairs before you got...

COHEN: And the Far East.

Q: And particularly in the Far East. So you were with the Central Intelligence Agency for awhile.

COHEN: Which is the father of FBIS, although FBIS was a very overt service.

Q: And I think it still is. Is it still with the CIA? But, anyway, you ended up in Chicago. Is that correct?

COHEN: Yes, ultimately. I went to Chicago in January 1957 and served there through December 1963, at which time I left to work as assistant research director in Charles H. Percy's first political campaign. He was running for governor.

Q: What attracted you to Percy?

COHEN: I was attracted to Percy when I arrived in 1957 in Chicago. He was the president of Bell & Howell Corporation, very interested both in the Republican Party and aligning himself with the moderate wing in the party, and also in the local political scene in Chicago. He also was very interested in foreign affairs and particularly in South Asia and was traveling to India on his vacations almost every year, once spending, I think, three weeks in India.

I thought that he was a voice of reform and moderation in Illinois politics. It had long been felt that someday he would run for public office. He had already been identified by President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower as a comer who should be encouraged. And, in fact, he did encourage Percy to run for public office. He named Percy head of his National Republican Party study on future policies that the party should adopt, and they came up with much more progressive social policies than the Republican Party had ever stood for before. And he chose Percy-although Percy had not been formally in politics-to be chairman of the Republican National Convention in 1960. There is a letter from Eisenhower to Percy encouraging him about that time to run for public office in which Eisenhower said, "And if you should ultimately attain the highest office in the land, no one would be more pleased than I," which is quite an endorsement from a sitting president.

Q: Oh, yes. How did you come in contact with him?

COHEN: Well, I just admired him from afar. I was a civil servant. I wasn't engaged in politics in any way. My assignment there was one of contact in the name of the director of the CIA with business, banking, academic institutions, obtaining analyses of foreign developments, industrial, scientific, political, and so forth. But through a friend at the University of Chicago, I met on a social basis the then chairman of the political science department, Morton Grodzins, a very interesting person. He was a liberal Democrat, but he very much admired Charles Percy.

Percy was on the board of the university, and Grodzins felt that Percy had done more for the university than any board member in memory in raising interest in the physical and biological sciences there and in obtaining the funding to expand the university's efforts in those fields particularly. But he said Percy was a Renaissance man. He was interested in everything. And he encouraged me-if Percy ever ran for public office-to join Percy. And when Percy did announce in '63 that he was going to run for governor in '64, Grodzins put me in touch with him.

Q: This first contact, what were you doing with Percy?

COHEN: With Percy, in that first campaign for governor, I was assistant research director.

Q: Which means what?

COHEN: I was doing research on issues. I also wrote many, many articles for Percy's approval and signature. In fact, because Percy was not so well known downstate, before he would make his first appearance in a community, I would write an article which would appear in the most popular paper in that community, establishing his points, his policies, his platform. And I also was researching the issues in each community so that he was familiar with them.

Q: How did Percy operate? What was his method of working on this?

COHEN: He worked from 6:00 a.m. until midnight every day. He had tremendous energy. He was born in 1919, and this was 1964. So he was still young. He was a very lively, energetic, dynamic person. In fact, his dynamism was so obvious to everyone who heard him or saw him or saw him in the media that we used for the original primary campaign the slogan, "Chuck Percy: The Dynamic Conservative." After we won the primary, which was a hard primary, but we won by a margin of two to one over the state treasurer, William Scott, we changed that to, "The Dynamic Republican," for the general campaign.

He's a very serious man. In order to prepare himself to run for public office, for example, he employed a young Ph.D. candidate, who was already teaching in the Political Science Department of the University of Chicago, Robert A. Goldwin, who was extremely knowledgeable about the Constitution and the framers and the early days, to educate him on the political process. And they studied the Federalist Papers and similar publications over a period of years starting, I think, in 1959 and only stopping when the campaign schedule got heavy in '64. Every Saturday, Goldwin went to his house in the suburbs and spent about three hours with him discussing the readings which Percy had done during the week and assigning a paper to Percy to write every week. It's rather remarkable for a CEO to go into it in such depth. But Percy thought he should be better grounded than he was in politics, although he was a graduate of the University of Chicago himself in economics.

So Percy was a serious person. He also was a person who always, and to this day, seeks the opinions of others. And what was remarkable to members of the staff was that he wanted to be criticized frankly when any one of us thought he did something poorly, said something poorly, took a position with which we disagreed, and so forth. And one could argue these points, sometimes be persuasive, sometimes just get a fair hearing. But he took the criticism seriously. He never wanted a "yes" man. At one point, I had some differences with him over a two-year period, during which he called me "Dr. No." But he kept me on, even raised my pay.

Q: We want to move to the Senate, but how did the campaign for governor go, and your role in it?

COHEN: Well, in the primary we had the significant opponent, William Scott, who was supported by the Chicago Tribune and a large element of the Republican Party, which was quite conservative. But I think because Percy was such an attractive personality-and there were some moderates around-he managed to win something like 63 percent of the vote in the primary. And we went into the general election against a very strong and popular governor, Otto Kerner, whom we respected till near the end of the campaign. He was a responsible person.

The biggest complaint one could make against Kerner was that he was in Mayor Daley's hip pocket, and I think he found that politically necessary. But he was a responsible governor, except that in September, someone came to us with information which led to a charge of corruption in his administration, and his campaign manager, who had been the state director of finance earlier in the Kerner administration, had to resign and ultimately was prosecuted and so forth.

Well, Kerner defeated us by, I think, 80,000 votes out of 4 million cast. And ultimately Kerner went to prison in his next term for awarding preferred racing dates to a racetrack in exchange for stock that was worth a dollar a share and was sold to him for ten cents a share. This was very hard for us to believe, because Kerner had such a reputation for integrity. And the irony of all this was that Kerner, in prison, contracted cancer, was in very bad health, and Percy, then a sitting senator, arranged with, I guess it was the Nixon-Ford administration, to have him released from prison so he could die a free man. And he died in, maybe, six or eight months. It was very sad.

Q: In this period before Percy ran successfully for the Senate, which was when?

COHEN: '66.

Q: So this was about a two-year period.

COHEN: Well, I've been talking about 1964, the year he ran against Kerner.

Q: What were you doing in that interim time?

COHEN: The morning after the 1964 election-we lost- Percy had a press conference in the campaign headquarters at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago. And then he walked over to me and said, "I would like you to stay on with me in a personal capacity, and we'll talk about it." And then we were closeted for several hours, Percy and his family, who left after about a half hour, and the top four or five advisors, to decide what we were going to do next and how we were going to close out the campaign, which, you know, when you mount a campaign, you're putting together a multi-million dollar organization for one year. And how do you dismantle it? Whom do you keep for future operations, if any? What are your future plans that you can foresee at that moment?

Q: There's much more to it than one realizes, isn't there?

COHEN: Oh, yes. And so it was decided at that meeting that I would be retained. And we decided that we would try to do things to advance certain proposals we had made in the campaign such as combating illiteracy, which was still a major problem in Illinois, functional illiteracy-unable to read, write, and compute at above a sixth-grade level. And we wanted to do something about economic development for southern Illinois, which was in bad straits, and we were concerned with urban problems in Chicago, because the Daley administration, which was very efficient in many respects, badly neglected the minority populations.

So I did a lot of research, interviewed dozens of people, got ideas, and came up with a program which we started to implement in January '65. It was established with the name the New Illinois Committee. We opened an office, and we started projects. And it was really very well received. Of course, it also had the benefit, which we didn't overlook, of keeping Percy in the public eye, doing constructive things, looking toward running for governor again four years later.

Q: Then we move to '66.

COHEN: Also, in '65, I was writing his speeches, some on foreign affairs, some on civil liberties and so forth, and doing his press work. We had no intention of running in '66. The three-term incumbent, Paul Douglas, we felt, was still very popular. Percy had personal respect for him. Percy saw himself more as a governor than a senator, as a manager. He had been a manager all his adult life.

The Republican Party was insisting that he run. The moderates wanted a moderate like Percy to run. The conservatives wanted Percy to run, because even if he lost, well, then they'd be finished with him. They wouldn't have to listen to him anymore. But they were willing to support him against a man they considered a socialist, Paul Douglas. Everett Dirksen, who was the Republican senator from Illinois and who had reservations about reform types such as Percy, urged him to run as the only person who had a chance against Douglas. I think Dirksen didn't care if he should lose either, but in the campaign he was very helpful.

So we thought, well, we'd better do a poll and see if there's any possibility of winning. And we found that although Douglas had been in office for eighteen years, we were only six points behind him. And Percy had higher name recognition, maybe because he had just run. So we did a lot of thinking for a couple of months and then decided to go. And in that '66 campaign, I was the press secretary and the spokesman, and advised Percy on foreign policy.

Q: Were there any foreign policy issues that came up during the campaign? Because Douglas was a very respected senator, considered a pillar of the liberal establishment, I guess, in the Democratic Party.

COHEN: Absolutely. In 1966, we made Vietnam a major campaign issue against Douglas. The escalation that President [Lyndon B.] Johnson began in early 1965 was really taking hold, and our commitment of troops was mounting in numbers very quickly. From my earlier experience in Vietnam and from watching it very closely in the intervening years, I already had doubts about what we could accomplish in Vietnam, and about the cost, both in blood and treasure, that it would take to accomplish anything. We talked a great deal about this.

In April '66, we had a full day at, I think it was, O'Hare Inn at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where we met with Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Bruce Harlow, Mort Halperin, and Bob Osgood and talked Vietnam the whole day, heard their views, encouraged them to argue their disagreements and so forth, taped it so we could go back over it. Percy wanted to bring together people on both sides of the question and in between to make sure that he was hearing the best arguments on what to do. It was a pretty fascinating day for us.

Q: I'm sure it was.

COHEN: These are outspoken people. As we drove downtown in the evening after that, I was surprised to find that Mort Halperin, who, like me, was questioning the war effort, had made a profound impact on Percy's own thinking, although Percy's closest friend in the group was Henry Kissinger, whom he had known for years. Kissinger had served under him on the commission in the '50s to plot the future direction of the Republican Party. I thought going into this meeting that Kissinger's views might prevail.

Q: Which were strongly to support, or where were they?

COHEN: Well, I don't like to characterize them exactly, because I don't remember that well. I might, on thinking it over, but I wasn't prepared to talk about that today. So I don't want to misrepresent his views. But I believe he was not opposing the policy. Well, he was not opposing the policy of Johnson.

And, as I recall, Percy asked him, "Well, how long do you think this will go on?"

Kissinger thought and finally said, "Maybe seven years, but I think we'll prevail." Well, it was seven years, approximately, till the Paris agreement.

But Percy wanted to explore further what we would call the dovish position. And so I put together readings for him for and against the dovish position. I tried always to be fair to him in my input, so it wasn't just my opinion. If he asked me my opinion, I'd tell him my opinion, or I'd write it as one of the opinions for him to consider. But I never shielded him from the people who disagreed with me. And he trusted me because that was always the case to the last day.

Mort Halperin had gone beyond my position on the dovish side. We thought that there might be political risks in being dovish in 1966, because that view was just starting to take hold of the most liberal Democrats and not even all of them-not Paul Douglas, who was supporting Johnson down the line, saying that we have to stop communism in Vietnam. But it was very risky with our Republicans.

Q: I'm sure it was.

COHEN: And the only Republican who had expressed dovish views up to that point was the governor of Oregon, Mark Hatfield, who also was running for the Senate.

Well, in June, I took a brief vacation, maybe four or five days. I went to the University of Missouri to meet with former Army buddies. And when I returned I was told that Duff Reed, the press secretary to Thruston Morton, sitting senator from Kentucky, who was chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, had come to Chicago at Morton's request to discuss things with Percy, how they could help and so forth. Duff said we should think in terms of a global conference on the Vietnam problem to resolve it. The campaign manager, who was fairly conservative, was interested in it. So I had to take it seriously. So I took it seriously for a couple of days, and I tried to refine it into something that was more credible, less global, and less subject to criticism. And I came up with the idea for an all-Asian peace conference on Vietnam that would include China but not the Soviet Union. Well, the first reaction to this was, "Oh, God. You've got to bring Communist China into it? We'll be killed in the election."

Well, I refined it some more but left China in, saying that such a conference would be meaningless without China. China has to agree or the war goes on. You have to include China. But I said we don't have to worry, because the American interest would be supported by most of the other countries of Asia, and so we wouldn't be run over there. So I discussed it with professors and so forth. I think I got back to Brzezinski. I talked to liberal Republican senators and Thruston Morton. And Morton thought, "Gee, this is a pretty good idea." He said, "This might give the Republican Party something to hang on to if public opinion turns against the war." But it hadn't yet. So I talked to Mark Hatfield on the phone, and he thought it was a good idea. He said, "I'll support that." Duff Reed talked to conservative Republicans on the Hill, and some of them thought, "Oh, you know, for a political thing. Since we're never going to do it . . ." [Laughter]

Well, we did go public with that, I think in early July '66. And Douglas, as we expected, denounced it and said, in effect, "It's a patriotic thing to support your president when you have your men in the field. You're going to undercut them." We got some flak from the right wing, but most of them thought we didn't mean it. They thought it was just a political gambit, so they weren't so angry. But it wasn't. Percy meant it, and he thought he was taking a political risk rather than doing it for political value.

But, suddenly, those known in Chicago as the lakefront liberals started coming in and saying they'd like to help in the campaign. Ab Mikva, the Democratic congressman, was running for re-election, and we found that a lot of the college students who were working for his campaign came over to our campaign, and some said, "Well, we'll work for you during the day"-that was in the summer-"and for him at night or vice versa." We found a lot of support coming in. So, ultimately, the chance we took on Vietnam helped us, and it was one of the major issues in the campaign, because it was one of the clearest differences between Douglas and Percy. Percy wasn't saying the United States should get out. He was saying we should be working for peace rather than victory, because victory was unattainable without nuclear weapons, and we could not use nuclear weapons.

Then I found in my research at the newspapers that Paul Douglas in, I guess it was late 1952-it was after the Chinese had entered the Korean War-was quoted in a two- paragraph AP [Associated Press] story as saying, "The situation is deteriorating in Korea, and we will have to use nuclear weapons." We held that information over the summer and early fall, and in October in an appearance on "Face the Nation," Paul Douglas was asked about that, and he did not deny it. He said, "What I meant was tactical nuclear weapons only against troops, not against civilians. And I thought it was the only way to save the situation, and I would say it again."

And they said, "You'd use them in Vietnam?"

He said, "No, it's unnecessary there." He knew he had made a mistake. And we got a very big liberal vote and defeated Paul Douglas by, I think it was, 420,000 votes.

Q: Let's move on to the time that you came into the Senate, but let's focus on the foreign relations side. What were you up to, what was your position, and how did things develop? This would have been '67.

COHEN: We went to the Senate in January '67. From the outset, Percy was seen as a comer by the Washington press, and we were really besieged by the press from day one. Also, Congressional Relations at State was after us immediately.

Q: This is Congressional Relations within the Department of State, which is called the H Bureau.

COHEN: Right. H was after us immediately to get us on board in various policies of the Johnson administration. Percy and I hadn't discussed what I would do. It was assumed I would be press secretary, so I was getting the press. But I was the only one on the staff who knew anything about foreign affairs, so I was getting visitors from State and ACDA, the arms control agency. ACDA came right over with a book of quotations from Republicans in favor of arms control to show us that it was okay to be for arms control and be a Republican, too, and this sort of thing.

So I guess after about a week or ten days, I went in to Percy and I said, "I'm doing foreign affairs and press, and I really don't have time to do both. They're full-time jobs."

He said, "Which would you prefer to do?"

I said, "foreign affairs."

He said, "Well, what's your reason for that?"

I said, "Well, one, it's more important. Two, I've always been interested in it. And, three, I'm sick and tired of rewrite men calling me at two and three in the morning to verify quotations and that sort of thing." [Laughter] I said, "My family will be happier."

So he said, "Okay." And we had my assistant do press until we hired someone at a more senior level.

Q: Where did Percy fit within the Senate at that time? What committees was he on?

COHEN: Well, you know, when you arrive, you don't have your choice. His first choice had been foreign relations, but he didn't get it. I think, on my recommendation, he pushed very hard then for his second choice, government operations, which I thought was a very useful committee, both in monitoring the bureaucracy, and, two, in making a record. Because there are always things that can be improved.

Q: And also it's one of his strengths as the executive officer of Bell & Howell.

COHEN: That's right.

Q: He had made a fine reputation.

COHEN: Yes, that's right. It seemed a perfect one. And they put us on the Space Committee, which he soon tired of, because all they did was authorize appropriations. There was very little policy. He got on the Banking Committee because he had an initiative we developed in the campaign to subsidize the purchase of low-income housing. And in his first month in the Senate-because we had written a piece of legislation during the campaign, we were ready to go-he got all Republican senators to co-sponsor his bill, which ultimately passed the next year and became law. So that was an early legislative victory for him.

On foreign affairs, we were deep into the Vietnam debate. But, you know, everything keeps coming up, and gradually you comment on everything. He was interested in the hearings in Foreign Relations, before he was a member of the committee, on national commitments, and we had a proposal there requiring an annual report on objectives of the foreign policy from the president, thinking that it might bring more candid responses and so forth. Looking back, maybe it was naive. It was not accepted by Chairman Fulbright, who had other ideas anyway. But Percy testified before the committee.

Very often he asked if he could come to a hearing. He sat at the end of the table. They let him question and so forth. So he was interested from the start, and I worked very closely with staff members of the committee. Well, at that time the staff was not bipartisan. They were all for Fulbright. [Laughter] They were all Fulbright appointees.

Q: Could you give me your impression, first, of how the Department of State worked, we'll say, with a new senator coming in, who was sort of a liberal Republican looking at some opposition to our major commitment? What was your impression of how they operated and the type of pressure that would be...

COHEN: In general, they were diplomatic. I'm trying to think who was the first assistant secretary for congressional relations we dealt with. Was it MacArthur?

Q: It could well have been Douglas MacArthur. He was there at one time. I can check that.

COHEN: And I don't think he was very aggressive, as I recall. The earliest assistant secretary for congressional relations, with whom we had a great give-and-take was Dave Abshire in the [President Richard M.] Nixon administration.

Q: [Referring to notes] It would have been MacArthur probably.

COHEN: Yes.

Q: William Macomber took over from '67 to '69.

COHEN: That's right. And we had a lot of contact with "Butz".

Q: Yes, because he was a creature of Congress, too, wasn't he?

COHEN: Originally, yes. He was very effective. He was a good diplomat, and he was a good politician. We respected him. You could disagree with him in an agreeable fashion on both sides. He was very fine, and I think he had considerable influence because he was trusted. That varied over the years. Some people didn't handle it very well. "Butz" Macomber handled it very well. I think he had been ambassador to Jordan.

Q: Yes. And Turkey at one time. Back and forth.

COHEN: He knew a great deal about the Middle East. I think, personally, he was a very open-minded person. He had the right personality and style to deal with senators, and he dealt with the staff fairly and honestly. We liked him. But I think very early on we asked if Senator Percy and I could meet directly with the leadership of each of the regional bureaus.

Q: This is the State Department?

COHEN: Yes. And we went over to State for these meetings, which usually lasted two or three hours. And we'd sit down with the assistant secretary and his deputy assistant secretaries and maybe a couple of office directors, and I think in some cases we asked for specific office directors because we were interested in those areas like South Asia. Percy had this long interest in South Asia. That was very educational for us, not only in clarifying where the administration stood on everything, but also in getting answers to our questions and starting to come to some conclusions about where we might differ.

Q: Just as a technique, did you find that by going over to the Department of State, talking to the desk officers, the bureau chiefs and all, that this was a more informal, easier- to-deal-with thing than later on having somebody sit before the microphones before the Foreign Relations Committee? I mean, if you wanted to get information, it strikes me that this would not be as loaded politically.

COHEN: That's right. Well, through the years and even now, we always maintained close relations with the bureaus and numbers of people within each bureau so that we could call them up. They'd drop in or we'd go there and get a more candid view than they could give before the microphones in the hearings. Also, it was educational for us, because these are the people who are dealing only with those subjects, and we had to deal with everything. We needed it, and the senator, early on, went over to the CIA, too, and had similar meetings and established relations for me at a fairly senior level where I could always get information, where I'd always be welcome.

Q: So you found that even during a period of increasing- oh, I don't know, I'd call it political tension. But, you know, I mean, as the Vietnam War obviously saw more and more interest, this was not the Congress versus the State Department or CIA. I mean, the lines of communications were open?

COHEN: Oh, absolutely, yes. The most problem we had over the years was never with State or the director of the CIA or the secretary of defense, although sometimes with the secretary of defense on some issues, for example, the ABM deployment. But our big problem was always with the White House staff in each administration starting with Nixon. We didn't have so much contact with White House staff in the last two years of the Johnson administration when we were there, because Percy had a personal relationship with Johnson, and he'd go to Johnson directly. And except for Harry McPherson, we didn't know the White House staff too well. Harry McPherson became a friend and is still a friend.

Q: What was Harry McPherson's title in the White House staff?

COHEN: Well, I'm not sure what his title was. But he was one of the top three or four in the Johnson White House, and Percy got to know him also because both of them were on the board of the Kennedy Center.

Q: To concentrate on sort of this relationship business, because I think this is extremely important, when the Nixon administration came on, here all of a sudden you were a Republican senator, you had a president coming on board who was certainly interested in foreign policy.

COHEN: And knowledgeable.

Q: And really knowledgeable. Although maybe there's obviously a personality difference, but with Nixon everybody was a personality difference, I think. There seemed to be a real meeting of minds. How did this work as you saw it?

COHEN: Well, in politics, as you know, there are different kinds of people. There are consensus makers, and at the other end there are what I consider to be sort of killers-people who want to destroy their opponents, not only because they may be rivals, but because they may interfere with what a person wants to do or disagrees strongly on an issue or a position that's of great concern to the president or to his secretary of state. Secretaries of state, though, in general, as I have seen them over the years, are not as tough as presidents.

As we went into the Nixon administration, Percy had good connections, although he had supported Nelson Rockefeller against Nixon at the convention. He had known Nixon since the '50s when Nixon served under him on the commission that Percy headed for the Republican Party. And Nixon had come to Illinois in 1964, to Percy's home where we had maybe 1,000 people to speak for Percy. And they were always in touch. They didn't always agree, but they had a nice relationship.

Percy had been in touch with Kissinger since the '50s when Kissinger was also on the commission, and Percy respected him. As for Bill Rogers, I don't know if Percy knew him before-when he was attorney general in the Eisenhower administration-probably not well. But he recognized Bill Rogers as a man of character and integrity and rightly predicted to me that Kissinger would run over him. But he always was in touch with Bill Rogers and respected him.

So there were some friends around, old friends. I think the Nixon group had written Percy off as a friend when he supported Nelson Rockefeller. One of them said that Percy would have been a more likely choice for vice president had he not done that. But I don't think that would have happened.

But I think very early in the Nixon administration, certainly no later than March 1969, Nixon announced that he was going to change the ABM plan.

Q: That's the anti-ballistic missile plan.

COHEN: To produce and deploy. From the [Robert] McNamara formula in the Johnson administration of putting these missile launchers in the suburbs. [Laughter] Which was not very good politics. I'm not sure it was very good for anything. But Nixon said, "We'll put them in the boondocks. We'll put them in North Dakota and so forth." And they thought they had solved a political problem, because they felt it was necessary and less offensive this way. Maybe we jumped in too quickly, but we had been studying that issue for a long time, starting during our campaign, and we didn't think that ABM production and deployment made a lot of sense, just as we didn't think that MRV missiles-

Q: MRV means multiple-

COHEN: Putting multiple warheads on single missiles, which we thought would be a terrible burden to the arms control process. So Percy immediately said, "That's no good. The new plan for the ABM is no good." And the White House was furious. Our domestic legislative director got a call from John Ehrlichman, who said, "You know, under your bill for low-income housing, we're supposed to name a presidentially appointed board to oversee the program. And after reading in the Post this morning what Senator Percy said about our ABM proposal, we don't think we're going to be able to do that."

And she said, "It's in the law."

He said, "I don't think we're going to be able to do that," and hung up on her.

That was mild compared to the hell we got from within the Nixon White House on other issues, because usually it wasn't said so softly. And we became more and more dovish on the war. It was not winnable and was not essential to our national interest. So we had big problems. And Dave Abshire...

Q: He was the head of congressional relations at the State Department during this period.

COHEN: Yes. Before, I think it was, the big vote, final vote, on ABM production and deployment, he came to see us. By that time, Percy was really an expert on the subject, because from his experience in industry, he involved himself in the manufacturing process and how this would be done and whether it was really feasible and what it would cost and so forth. He knew something beyond what the other dovish senators were saying. And we had a Sunday afternoon meeting every week at the home of John Sherman Cooper, the Republican senator from Kentucky, who was one of the most respected people in foreign affairs. Phil Hart, the Democrat from Michigan, was usually present and sometimes we invited someone else, and we discussed where the debate stood, what was needed in further research, what we should say next, who would take what role and so forth.

Dave Abshire came in to dissuade us from our position. Well, I suppose he was dispatched. It was really too late. Percy was one of the leaders of the fight here. And even if he changed his mind, it was too late to change, and he wasn't going to change his mind. And it was very quickly clear to Percy that he, Percy, knew much more about the ABM than Dave Abshire, who probably hadn't been so focused on it, because he's certainly smart enough. Abshire just failed totally to move us in any way. And, you know, we always liked to think of ourselves as open-minded, but he had nothing to offer we didn't already know.

Q: These were decisions, really, that were coming not-I mean, on the ABM...

COHEN: It wasn't from the State Department.

Q: This was really coming as a political decision, wasn't it? How about from the Department of Defense, too?

COHEN: Maybe they felt that because we respected Abshire he could dissuade us. But that didn't succeed. And you know how it ended up. The measure to cut off ABM production and deployment, just leave research and development, was defeated on a 50-50 vote. And the reason it was defeated was that Margaret Chase Smith, Republican of Maine, who was one of the most opposed to ABM production, said, "I don't want research and development either. So I can't vote with the other doves on this." So ABM production and deployment would have been defeated fifty-one to forty-nine, except that she had this quirk in her head. And everybody pleaded with her. She wouldn't listen. She says, "I'm not voting for research and development." Terrible mistake.

Q: When did Senator Percy get on the Foreign Relations Committee?

COHEN: He got on, I think it was, the middle or the third week in February 1972.

Q: This is after the new crop of senators came in?

COHEN: I guess. Oh, no, no. Because the election would be in November '72. Someone had dropped off or been defeated.

Q: Did your role change then?

COHEN: Well, yes. I had to prepare him for every hearing. I had more work, and I had access then to all the closed meetings.

Q: What does this mean, for somebody who doesn't understand the process, the access to closed meetings?

COHEN: To meetings that were closed to the public because of the security nature of the information that would be discussed. Under the Sunshine Act, there was a great cutback in the number of closed meetings. And, for example, under Sunshine, all the markups, the actual discussion of legislation line by line and all the decisions that are made in a piece of legislation then became open to the public, which was a good thing. Those things used to be closed, and the public really didn't know where everyone stood unless they chose to make it known.

Q: We're talking about from the '72 period on up through the early '80s. How did you see the personalities working on the Foreign Relations Committee, first between the senators and then with the staff?

COHEN: Well, by and large, the senators on the committee had a very cordial relationship one to the other. They were always polite. Occasionally there would be a flash of anger over something, but not often. There's a great desire in the Senate to be civilized and understanding of why members take different points of view, because they will be influenced by the interests of their constituency, the opinion of their constituency, the nature of their constituency, and their position in the party, their positions vis-à-vis other leaders within the party, their position toward the president if he happens to be of their party or of the president if he happens not to be of their party. All these things come into decisions on issues. It's not as simple as just deciding what you think would be the best course. It's the political process. And so they tend to be understanding of people who disagree with them, so long as the people are not disagreeable.

Q: Who was the chairman during most of this period?

COHEN: Well, until he was defeated in, I guess it was 1974, it was Bill Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas. Then it was John Sparkman for a couple of years, or four years maybe, a Democrat of Alabama. Then Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, until he was defeated in November 1980, at which time the Republicans obtained a majority in the Senate for the first time since the first Eisenhower administration, I believe, and Percy, as the senior surviving Republican, since Jack [Jacob] Javits had just been defeated, became chairman.

Q: It seems to me that being on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is a good way to get yourself defeated, isn't it? I mean, in a way they stick their head up on issues that leave them vulnerable.

COHEN: Oh, sure. Because they have to stand up and be counted on everything in foreign affairs. Despite what we generally think in Washington, most of the country, most of the people of the country, are not primarily interested in foreign affairs. There are particular groups who have particular interests, and so you hear of the lobbies-the peace lobby, the Jewish lobby, the Greek lobby, and so forth. And these people who care more about their one issue than anything else will likely vote on how a senator stands on his or her issue. You can't ignore them and survive in many states. Some states you can. So one has to at least be a good listener.

Q: William Fulbright from Arkansas was a major figure for many years, and you saw him towards the end of his career. How did you, as a staff member, see him, how he operated and his effectiveness at this period?

COHEN: He really was a dominant force on the committee. That was a time when committee chairmen were more powerful than they have been in subsequent years. For example, there was one staff for the committee-Fulbright's staff. Later they voted to allow a majority and a minority staff. But Fulbright controlled all the resources, financial and human, of the committee. In effect, Fulbright was the committee. Sometimes he lost something, but not often.

And he had a bully pulpit for his views, which were sometimes unique. He may have been the first very prominent senator in the '60s to denounce American involvement in the Vietnam War. He felt that President Johnson, who had been one of his closest personal friends and political allies from a neighboring state and whom he had known since Johnson arrived in Washington, had deceived him about the alleged North Vietnamese attack in the Gulf of Tonkin. Fulbright had been the manager of the Tonkin Gulf resolution doing the bidding of President Johnson. Then later he found out that there were serious questions about the legitimacy of the administration position and its interpretation of the attack and so forth. And he was very turned off, and he became such an outspoken opponent of US involvement in Vietnam that it ended up with President Johnson not talking to him. He was always ahead of the curve on Vietnam.

Also, he was the first person to question the unquestioning support for Israel in the Middle East. He thought there were questions that should have been raised, and that if we raised them, we could still have a good and supportive arrangement with Israel but would have better served our national interest in having a relationship also with the Arab world.

Q: How did Percy deal with him?

COHEN: Well, I should say that except for maybe Hubert Humphrey, who had returned to the Senate, Fulbright wasn't listening to anyone. He was singing his own tune. And at the beginning of every hearing he might speak for half an hour on what his conclusions were before the hearing. [Laughter] But he was fascinating. He was brilliant, intelligent, creative, and eloquent. It was an education to listen to him, whether one agreed or not.

Q: Did you see any change during this period, say, really during the '70s, between how the State Department and both of the Congressional Relations, the H Bureau, but the other bureaus related both with the Foreign Relations Committee and the staff?

COHEN: Well, at the beginning, Douglas MacArthur was the head of Congressional Relations when we arrived. We had less relationship with him than with his successors, partly, probably, because he may not have considered us very significant, being new and not on the committee and so forth. I have the feeling, though, from what I heard, that he wasn't on the Hill a great deal; whereas some subsequent ones like Macomber and Abshire were.

One of the men I have most respected in politics is Linwood Holton, who was a Republican-I think the first Republican governor of Virginia since Reconstruction. I think he was elected in 1970. And he was a courageous and progressive governor who's still doing important things for the state, a wonderful human being. But he became assistant secretary for congressional relations. I think it was after he left office, which would have been probably in the Ford administration. And, one, he didn't know a great deal about foreign affairs. Two, because he was a little unsure of positions, he didn't testify very effectively. And, three, he didn't feel comfortable at the State Department where he felt that the career people didn't accept him, because they knew more about the substance, and he was trying to carry water for the president. [Laughter] And he also had the burden that the secretary, who was Henry Kissinger, was so much more articulate and persuasive on these issues than he could be, that he wasn't taken too seriously.

So it was sort of a flop-I would say the only flop of his career. He's a great person. He was a bad choice. They looked for a political position, and they didn't find the right one for him, although he might have served very well somewhere else. So that wasn't too successful. He didn't come to the Hill more than he had to, either, because he didn't feel comfortable. He didn't feel comfortable with some of the policies, too. You ought to interview him sometime.

I'm trying to think of others. Maybe you could refresh my mind. Do you have a listing of them?

Q: I'm just looking quickly through this list. Three was Robert McCloskey and Douglas Bennet and Atwood.

COHEN: Yes. That's through the [President Jimmy] Carter administration.

Q: Yes.

COHEN: Well, Bob McCloskey knew everything. He had a broad experience, ambassador in several countries, very bright. He tended to be more combative than most. He's a more prickly guy. He's now working for Catholic Relief Services, and I see him occasionally. I once had a little confrontation with him at a luncheon meeting of a group of lobbyists. He was condemning Congress for getting in the way of their foreign policy, and so I took him on a little. But I do have a lot of respect for him.

Doug Bennet, a very capable fellow, now heads National Public Radio. I think he worked more with Democrats than Republicans, though. Brian Atwood, first-class fellow. He's heading the Democratic Party International Affairs Institute now, and he's a very solid, sound person, but maybe not as outgoing as you need for that job. But he and Bennet were both respected.

Q: I've often heard it said in some of these interviews by people who are not in the Foreign Service that the Foreign Service does not really understand or appreciate the role of Congress, and they don't do their homework enough to explain policies or to give people in Congress a hook on which to sell it at home. In other words, they don't work too effectively with this. I wonder if you could talk a little about that.

COHEN: Well, I think that's true and maybe state congressional relations people who deal with Congress have a leg up if they have already served on congressional staff such as Macomber, Bennet, and Atwood, because they understand the pressures that members come under, and they're more likely to be understanding and, because they're more understanding, to have a better relationship.

Q: What about sort of below them, say, the office directors are often called up, the people who are the head of African affairs or something. Usually you have a professional Foreign Service officer. In your impression of the period of time we're talking about, how did they work, in testimony but also in other contacts with Congress?

COHEN: The testimony is not the important part of it. The important part of it is the one-on-one and closed meetings where they meet with the whole committee or with the whole subcommittee membership. Because relationships aren't built, really, at the hearings, the open hearings, because everybody's on stage. And the people from State aren't necessarily speaking for their own view, certainly not completely. In the one-on-one, they're more likely to discuss options or other considerations that they wouldn't mention publicly or intelligence information that they can't give publicly and so forth.

There's an advantage, you know, with Congress having access to the CIA that you can check out things you hear from one or the other, and sometimes you find that one has an ax to grind. Sometimes before the [President Ronald] Reagan administration, I would say, we would get more candid information from the agency. It got more politicized under [William] Casey, the director under Reagan.

Q: How about the Foreign Service, your contacts and other members of the staff contacts with them? Did you have the feeling that they were responsive or appreciative of the role of Congress, or was there a problem?

COHEN: Yes, there's often a problem. Those who worked in congressional relations tended to be briefed or prepared better to deal with the Hill, because they got more input about what had been happening and what was happening when they arrived. Others in the Department, when convinced of a particular view on a particular issue, in talking to a senator or a staff aide on the Hill, might betray their personal feelings that the persons on the Hill were less than patriotic or deficient in understanding of foreign affairs and that they really should change their position, "because I've just presented the truth". Quite a bit of that.

Q: In other words, not an awful lot of diplomacy was being displayed.

COHEN: They would say that in a diplomatic way, but the message was clear. In regard to State Department congressional relations, I'd like to put in a plug for one person who worked in H in the eighteen years I served on the Hill, who stood head and shoulders, in my opinion, above all others lobbying for the State Department. And that was Kempton Jenkins, who-I'm not sure exactly of the years, but I suspect he was in H from something like '71 to '74, something like that, or '72 to '75. He worked the Hill in greater depth than anyone else I ever saw.

Q: How did he do it?

COHEN: Constant contact. There were weeks when there were important issues before us, before the committee, when he would call me every day. He would share information. If he heard that some new point had been made in a press conference that day, he might call. He would call particularly if it was a point against the State Department position, and he would try to put it into context before I heard about it directly. He was on the ball. He was always informed, and he was articulate and effective. He developed a lot of trust on the Hill. And he had what others sometimes lacked, and that was self-confidence. Because some people assigned to congressional relations may not be well chosen, and they're not lawyers for the prosecution, so to speak. They're not the kind of advocate that will be effective, because members of Congress and their staffs tend to be rather direct and will attack a position out of hand and so forth. They would become flustered and not handle things very well. Kempton Jenkins could mix it up in an amiable way.

Q: It's a different style. Let's say somebody came to you. What was your position?

COHEN: Staff director.

Q: Maybe you could give an example of how this might work. Or can you think of an issue in which you were getting people coming to you from the various agencies concerned, which I assume would be Treasury, State, CIA, and Defense, and then where Percy, when you were working for Percy, would be open to suggestion? Would you be open to suggestion? Can you think of, say, an example of how you would deal with him and these other people?

COHEN: When the executive branch officials came?

Q: Yes, the White House, too.

COHEN: We found there was more open-mindedness before final decisions were made by interagency committees at the NSC level. And if we could be heard before the final decisions were made, there was a chance that what we say would be considered or factored in. Also, in discussing it ahead of the decision, we found out what the political hang-ups were within the administration and within different agencies and so forth. And so we would have more understanding of why they were taking their points of view. But very often, while the interagency process was going on, they would try to hide it from members of Congress, and we would only hear when the public announcement was made. Or the night before the members would be called at their home and said, "We're going to do this tomorrow. We hope you'll support us." Really after the fact. So the wise secretary of state, when it is a real hairy issue politically, will inform the key members of the committee and the leadership of the Senate and House as things go along. He might try to persuade them of his view within the interagency process and get some support for it, too, rather than hide it and spring it.

Q: I assume there would be, if nothing else, natural resentment.

COHEN: Sure.

Q: We went through probably the most difficult time with our relations with the subcontinent, particularly India, at the height of this time when Kissinger was tilting towards Pakistan, in his own words. You had Senator Percy taking a particular interest in this area. As sort of a case study, what were the reactions and feelings on this, which is something which is still remembered, I mean, in a way of almost-I won't say a black mark against Kissinger, but is remembered by some of them that dealt with the problem?

COHEN: Percy was never close to the Pakistani position, but in nuclear matters he would be critical of India, too. He tended to give a little more primacy to India than to Pakistan when successive administrations gave primacy to Pakistan for various reasons, some very good. Basically, what he was interested in was a policy which would encourage more harmony between India and Pakistan and a resolution of the problems between them and more openness between them, more meetings between them, and so forth.

I remember one phone call we made to Hal Saunders when he was at the NSC handling South Asia, and the position he was expressing, and strongly-you know, he's eloquent, too-was so tilted toward Pakistan that Senator Percy just shook his head. It was clear that we weren't going to get anywhere pursuing that within the administration. Of course, that was Kissinger's position, too. They had reasons to like Pakistan. Pakistan was putting them in touch with China. Then, of course, much later Pakistan was taking the Afghan refugees. There was always some reason. But Percy felt, and I felt, that the leadership of Pakistan in most of those years was very cruel to the people and not to be admired because they did us favors or had mutual interests in certain areas. And we felt all along that they were going ahead with the nuclear development.

Q: Did Senator Percy have any influence, or was just Kissinger running the show?

COHEN: I don't think he influenced Kissinger on that. He had, and still has, some influence in India and Pakistan. He was out there ten days ago, a month before that, and so forth. He's always had access to the highest circles, and continues to. Of Pakistani leaders, the one he's been closest to is Benazir Bhutto, whose case he plead with previous governments and helped her go back in good health.

Early on, I guess it was around 1970, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of East Pakistan was jailed, I think it's generally agreed that Percy, more than anyone else, influenced the government to release him. And then Percy was supportive of the establishment of Bangladesh. And when finally he went there some years later, there was sort of a public celebration.

Q: I wonder if you could talk a bit about the two lobbies. One was very evident, and that's obviously the Jewish lobby on Israel. And the other one, though, came up-I know, because I served in Greece about the time-the Greek lobby, which sort of surprised everybody. But I wonder if you could talk about the influence. Here is a senator and his staff and all dealing with the-I'm not even sure if you can really call it the Jewish lobby. It's really the Friends of Israel or whatever you want to call it.

COHEN: They're called the pro-Israel lobby, because it goes beyond the Jewish community.

Q: Have the impression that until very recent times this was almost an absolute instrument of the Israeli government. But what was your impression in dealing with this, and how effective was it?

COHEN: Well, I first had contact with the pro-Israel lobby and with the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), when Cy Kenan was the head of it. He was the founder of it. And I guess that was when we came to the Congress in the late '60s. He had a different style. He tried to make friends for Israel and to persuade people to be supportive of Israel. And he talked to everyone across the board from liberal Democrat to right-wing Republican. He didn't try to overpower them by telling them how many Jewish constituents they had. He assumed they knew. He didn't put pressure on. He tried it by persuasion, and I think he was pretty respected.

Of course, it was a period in which Israel's image was perhaps more positive than it is today, because Israel had done a remarkable thing in making the desert bloom and establishing a democratic state in the Middle East. At that time, although there were the smaller parties, basically it was a two-party system. It was almost a one-party system. It was the Labor party until the mid-'70s that was always in power, and the Labor party didn't have many zealots. They were sort of practical people.

Q: They were almost a European Social Democratic party.

COHEN: Right. There was more socialism than some Americans liked. But it was a mixed economy, and there was respect in this country for Chaim Weizmann, Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Abba Eban. They were sort of a good bunch. And none of them expressed hostility for the Arabs. The Israeli Arabs, while they may have suffered some discrimination in employment, were treated decently and a lot of them participated in the process at the local level, and some were in the Knesset, as they still are. But I would say that the discrimination against the Israeli Arab at that time was less than we had toward the blacks in this country at that time. And the Arabs weren't restive within Israel.

The big change in that came after the '67 War when Jordan lost what are now known as the occupied territories, the West Bank, and Egypt lost Gaza. But there was no national movement among the Palestinians, I think, until something like 1964, and it had no power or prominence until after the '67 War. We had good understanding with the leaders of Israel, and I think successive presidents liked them.

I should also remind you, though, that we did not give massive aid to Israel in those days. It wasn't very large. As a matter of fact, they were getting their military equipment basically from France. The first issue I can remember of controversy was whether we would provide fighter planes to Israel. That may have been in '67. Do you remember that?

Q: Yes, I think we were then beginning to talk, maybe, about the F-4s or some other planes.

COHEN: And the major aid didn't start until after Camp David when these tremendous commitments of aid were made to Egypt and Israel as sort of a payoff for each taking a chance at Camp David. So the situation has changed a lot. And as the situation became more controversial out there and the problems of the Palestinians became greater, public opinion in the United States didn't change a lot until recently. But certainly attitudes in each administration and among members of Congress were changing and there became more willingness to hear the Arab point of view. But except for, you know, a half a dozen members of Congress of Arab descent, and Fulbright, who started being critical in the early '60s, there was almost nobody in the Congress who was questioning anything Israel did.

Q: So you didn't feel a very heavy hand of AIPAC or anything else like that?

COHEN: No, and AIPAC wasn't playing hardball. AIPAC started playing hardball when Cy Kenan retired and Murray Amitay, who had been a foreign affairs aide to Senator Ribicoff took over. He was a hardball player. I remember before he was in that position, when he was still with Ribicoff, he was openly critical of Ribicoff, a Jewish senator, a Democrat from Connecticut. Among the staffers he would say, "Ribicoff doesn't have the kind of commitment we need for Israel," and all that sort of thing. He tended to be a little fanatical, and he started putting on the pressure. He built AIPAC by having chapters in all the Jewish centers throughout the country and bringing grassroots support for Israel and grassroots pressure.

Now, the vast majority of the American Jewish community didn't join AIPAC, but enough did. And it was the biggest and heaviest lobby and most determined because the traditional Jewish organizations-American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, B'nai B'rith, and so forth-were all supportive of Israel, and they would lobby generally in a very nice way and a very acceptable way for Israel. But they weren't pressuring members of Congress the way AIPAC subsequently did. And then AIPAC, in the last ten, twelve years-AIPAC, although it's called a political action committee, is not a fund-raising group that gives money to candidates. But they encouraged the formation of, maybe, sixty or eighty PACs that do that.

For example, when Paul Simon was considering running against Senator Percy in the '84 election, late '83, he didn't know whether he could raise the money. He and Percy had always had a comfortable relationship. Although they were of different parties, they were both sort of reform candidates. They had mutual respect. But there was a front-page story, the major story in the Chicago Tribune one day, that a certain person who was a leader in the Jewish community in Chicago, although, you know, it's not one mass of people, said that he had told Simon that if Simon would run, he could raise \$2 million from the American Jewish community to support his campaign. And the Tribune said, "Simon probably now will run." And a couple of weeks later, he announced. Now, I don't know if that's why he ran, but that was a little reassurance to him on the financial end.

Q: How was Percy dealing with Israel up through '84?

COHEN: I should say that he was pretty much unquestioningly supportive of Israel till '74, when he started to listen to the other side as well and started to feel that if somehow Israel's security could be guaranteed it would be in everybody's interest-the United States' interest, the Israeli interest-in having peace and security and maybe finally being accepted by other nations in the Middle East, if they would, under 242 and 338, give back some of the territories and let the Palestinians have something they could call their own. And he suggested from the start, you know, that might best be done if the new Palestine would be in confederation with Jordan if they wanted to be.

He said that publicly for the first time in January 1975, and all hell broke loose against him in the Jewish community and among Christian fundamentalists who are very supportive of Israel-the Jerry Falwells and so forth. He got a lot of flak, thousands and thousands of telegrams and letters immediately, and denunciations. And he had just come back from a trip to the Middle East where he met with everybody. That was January '75.

Sadat had made a profound impression on Percy. And Percy said, "I feel that Sadat is a man who wants peace and can be dealt with." That infuriated a lot of people. We had to schedule a meeting a few days later with the leaders of the Jewish community in Chicago, about 220. We met them in a hall in Chicago, where Percy made his position clear. And a little Orthodox rabbi in the back of the room, stood up, and he was beside himself. He said, "Senator, Sadat is a Nazi, and I wonder about you." Actually, you know, Sadat had been supportive of the Nazis in Egypt during World War II. He was working for independence for Egypt.

Q: Yes, I think most of the Egyptian Army was. They wanted to get rid of the Brits.

COHEN: So that was the basis of that. Some of the Jewish community continued to support Percy, especially people who had a lot of confidence in him. One man very active in Jewish life in Chicago said to me, "If Senator Percy has opened his eyes to something, maybe we all should. We should at least listen." The next election was in '78, and Percy got 61 percent of the Jewish vote. So he hadn't been written off entirely.

But then ALPAC inspired a massive campaign in '84, first for Percy's opponent in the primary, Tom Corcoran, a conservative Republican congressman from Ottawa, Illinois, and then for Paul Simon. And I think every Jew in the country got at least one letter in an envelope that said, "Percy: Number One Enemy of Israel in the US Senate." So in case they didn't even open it, they got that message. And then they recruited a member of the board of ALPAC from California, Michael Goland, a multimillionaire, to have an independent campaign, which was allowable under the election law, if it were completely independent. And he spent \$1.6 million against Percy in television ads, radio, and publications.

Q: What actually was Percy's stand by this time in '84 on Israel?

COHEN: His stand was the same, that there should be a negotiation for an independent Palestinian state in the territories. And he never said everything in the territories because he's sympathetic to Israel wanting to straighten out the line where it's only eleven miles wide and things like that. But ALPAC really made this the number one campaign they were focusing on in 1984.

Q: There you were, all the staff, dealing in international affairs. Were there any ways of dealing with this? How did you try to respond to this problem?

COHEN: Well, we've been responding since '75. I spoke in synagogues, you know, usually pitted against Paul Simon's campaign manager or his legislative director, and I must say that I was treated properly. Maybe in the question period someone would yell an angry question or answer, but, by and large, I was treated very well, fairly, and it was clear that in each place somebody was primed to get me. But the audiences generally reacted in a friendly way to me, perhaps because they felt it was unfair. And Percy spoke to a huge audience, maybe 2,000 people, at a synagogue on the North Shore of Chicago maybe three weeks before the election, and the audience was very fair. He was booed once, and Paul Simon was booed once, and they were both on issues not related to the Middle East.

We ended up with about 35 percent of the Jewish vote, which isn't much below what an average Republican gets anyway. But, see, we had been 61 percent six years before.

Q: Had you noticed a change, almost an earth change, in the attitude, say, of the Jewish community after the invasion of Lebanon and the massacres at the Palestinian camps and this sort of thing?

COHEN: It's hard to be very precise, but I had the feeling that at the time of the Lebanese war perhaps as many as forty percent, almost half the American Jewish community, didn't think it was a very good idea. They were supportive up to the point where the Israeli Army was supposed to stop, you recall. But when they went on to Beirut, support dropped off a lot. And when they allowed the fanatical Christian element to get into the Sabra and Shatila camps, support dropped very quickly, and I'm sure a majority of American Jews were then critical of that invasion, thought Israel should get out and stay out.

I think now if you polled the American Jewish community on the invasion of Lebanon, there might be 80 per cent against. The 20 per cent who like Sharon might defend it.

Q: Moving to the other lobby that was influential particularly in the summer of '74 and thereafter, was the Greek lobby after an abortive Greek coup on Cyprus which resulted in a counterattack and takeover of a good part of the island by Turkish forces. How did that affect your work and then the senator?

COHEN: Well, Greek Americans overwhelmingly, if not unanimously, condemned the invasion of Cyprus by Turkey. I felt they had a point in one respect, at least, and that was that the United States was aware that this was going to happen and didn't intervene between Turkey and Cyprus to prevent it the way we had once before. And I felt pretty strongly that we should have not allowed that to go forward. And I also felt over the years that the fact that we had military and intelligence bases in Turkey distorted our official view of the facts of the situation and of each issue that arose between Greece and Turkey. I mean, we were unerringly supportive of Turkey, come what may. And I felt that we should have tried harder to use our influence with Turkey to get some restraint in what they did and what they said, which was often very hostile.

Also, I was personally interested in the situation in Istanbul (which Greek constituents still call Constantinople), in the discrimination against the Greek church there, where Turkey, in effect, after the death of Athenagoris, appointed a new patriarch and restricted Greek schools and religious activities. So I wasn't so pro-Turkish. Issue by issue, I tried to be fair, but I thought we were in a strong enough position with Turkey-and often a stronger position than we were with Greece-that we could have encouraged them to moderate what they did.

Also, concerning Greece, I was very critical of our cozying up to the colonels, which I thought was a terrible thing. But when the colonels were overthrown, then I became more sympathetic to the Greek government and thought particularly over those years that we should have been more supportive of Karamanlis, who was really a fine democratic leader.

Q: How did you feel about the two administrations, the Carter administration and the emphasis on human rights? How was this received by Senator Percy and the committee?

COHEN: Well, I think it was an educational process where politicians gradually responded to public opinion, often the product of these lobbies who were complaining about human rights violations in whatever area they were interested in. And then it got expanded and so forth, and it started to become more of an issue with the Helsinki talks and Basket Three of the Helsinki Accords. And the [President Gerald] Ford administration started to pick it up tentatively. Henry Kissinger, by and large, was resisting it because he thought one made foreign policy decisions on other bases and that this was something to consider and try to do something about privately, not publicly, unless we're talking about communist violations, in which case there was something to be gained by going public. That was the general feeling in the mid-'70s.

Then Carter became president. Well in his campaign he talked a good deal about human rights violations, and the American people responded to that-why can't others be more like us, moral and upstanding and fair? Then I don't know if Carter intended for Pat Derian, his assistant secretary for human rights, to go as far as she did.

Q: Pat Derian.

COHEN: Yes. I don't know, but she was on the side of the angels, and people couldn't say no to her in an open hearing. But I think that human rights sometimes assumes an importance in foreign policy beyond what it should be. I think it should be a major factor, but not the ultimate factor in deciding our relations with other nations. Now, Senator Percy never expressed this or held this view, maybe, as strongly as I did. But I think, in general, people knowledgeable about foreign affairs have somewhat of this opinion.

Q: Well, now, I wonder if you could describe how you all responded and saw the Reagan administration? It came in in '81, and you left in '85. Here was a whole new ball game, new figures, much more a real, real change ideologically. I'm speaking strictly, of course, of foreign relations.

COHEN: Well, our initial concern was greater than our ultimate concern, because when Secretary [Alexander] Haig said, "We're going to the source," it seemed like he was talking about invading Cuba, which we didn't think was a desirable thing to do. We had had an experience...

Q: This was concerning Nicaragua.

COHEN: Yes. Because Cuba was the source.

Q: Not only Nicaragua but El Salvador, too.

COHEN: When George Shultz came in, we were inclined to have more confidence, because we had known him for a long time. I first met him, I think in 1957, when he was a professor of industrial relations at the University of Chicago.

Q: You were working in Chicago, so he was sort of a hometown boy.

COHEN: That was before he was even dean of the business school. And I remember going home and telling my wife that I thought I had met a really outstanding person who was very open-minded but also had strong views. I thought he was strong, decent, fine, intelligent. He made a profound impression on me. And Senator Percy knew him from those years, too, because Percy was on the board of the university, and thought a lot of him. When he came to Washington in the Nixon administration, he and Percy were very close, and I think he performed very well in the jobs he had, and we were happy to have him come back.

In fact, when Reagan was elected, Percy contacted him and said Shultz would be the man for secretary of state. Reagan didn't tip his hand, but chose Haig. Except for some of the Nicaraguan business, I don't think we had so many differences with the Reagan administration, after Shultz arrived, in foreign policy. But we did oppose them on things when we felt strongly. For example, Percy was really the architect of the defeat of Ernie Lefever to be assistant secretary for human rights.

Q: Can you explain what that was?

COHEN: Ernie Lefever was the nominee to be assistant secretary for human rights. He had great reservations about the importance of pursuing human rights, certainly in any public way. He gave us the impression that he would put human rights way down the list of factors. And he testified in a very evasive way, because there were a lot of members of the committee who were very strong for human rights as a major factor in US foreign policy. And he was somewhat haughty and self-righteous, and he was turning people away at every hearing, not just liberal Democrats but Republicans as well. Ultimately, a majority of the Republicans, as well as a majority of the Democrats, voted against him. And then the next day he withdrew. It never went to a vote in the Senate. His greatest supporter on the committee, I guess, was Jesse Helms.

Q: Looking at your overall experience, how important was the Senate staff? Of the Foreign Relations Committee, one hears often that the staff has grown so much-I mean, of all of Congress-and that it's really a third power within the government, and in many cases they are running things. You were a member of it, but looking back with some objectivity, how important has the staff become or has really its relations changed much particularly in the field of foreign relations?

COHEN: Are we talking just about the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee?

Q: Let's talk about foreign relations, but also as reflected, too, in the personal staff of a senator. I mean, from your experience.

COHEN: Yes. Well, I think the staff is very important, because in most offices the senator's greatest input on foreign affairs is from the person he works with every day. What's more, he wouldn't have hired and continued to employ that person if he didn't trust that person's judgment. So the staffer is an important influence.

I think that it's good for senators, or members of Congress in general, to have as much professional assistance as they can get. And, therefore, I think the fact that funds for staffing were increased over the years, up to a point, gave them more expertise on their staffs and made them less dependent on what the administration and the executive agencies told them, because you know the resources that the executive branch brings to bear on this. For example, even though a senator now may be able to employ one senior person in foreign affairs and two or three junior people doing research and so forth, that's not much to compete with the State Department which can bring up a room of experts on any subject and overwhelm us. And we don't know if we're always being told the truth. That's more obvious with the Defense Department, I think, than with State. But it happens. So members of congress need human support in these specialized areas.

Now, it depends a lot how the relationship works. It depends on the politics, the integrity, the character, the perceptiveness of the senator in how he accepts information from the staff and how he uses it and what he asks of them sometimes. Because he may want to take a position on an issue when the staffer disagrees and the staffer will try to dissuade him. But if he doesn't dissuade him, he'll have to go ahead and work that issue with the position the senator wants to take. The senator was elected. I'm sure this even happens in the State Department, anywhere. Some bosses become almost captive of their specialists or deputies, and others just regard them as another influence or someone else to be heard from. It depends on a personal relationship that develops and whether, over time, the staffer really earns the trust he's been given or whether he's made things more difficult for the senator. People are fired on the Hill, too. Some people don't stay very long. Some people are put into other jobs. Some are on the Hill to get experience, to get information, to make contacts, so that in two or three years they can move out to a good job in the private sector. There's a lot of in-and-out, but speaking for the offices of, maybe, some of the people I knew best-Senator Percy, Senator Javits, Senator John Sherman Cooper, Senator [Joseph R.] Biden, to some extent, Claiborne Pell-there were relationships with their aides so close that the aides could tell them the truth as they saw it and didn't have to agree, and so, therefore, were almost independent influences. I mean, they would carry out a policy that the senator decided on, but more often than not, if they felt strongly against something, they would have some influence. Because the relationship was close, the judgment of the aide was given fair consideration by the senator. And, of course, the judgment of the senator had a great influence on the thinking of the aide.

So these people were very influential. But that didn't mean that the senators, in all their contacts, social and political, weren't open to other ideas or weren't hearing other things, especially if they were on the Foreign Relations Committee and almost every night were dining with State Department officials, ambassadors, members of the White House staff. There was no way they could be kept in the dark by an aide.

Q: This is very interesting, because I think this is often overlooked by those of the perspective of the State Department. They say, "Well, Senator So-and-so's got an ideologue as a chief of staff and the senator's the captain." Well, particularly this would probably be true in any case. If they're on a particular committee, the senators are going out and getting all sorts of other things going on, which I think is overlooked.

One final question on this. You say the staff does research. How would you do research? If we're talking about the Marines in Lebanon, this was during George Shultz's time. We kept them there and we finally pulled them out. But while they were there, how would you do research-I mean, you as the staff--to give Senator Percy an idea to get the Marines out or keep them in?

COHEN: Generally, I'd pick up the phone and talk to those who were likely to know the most about it and to those who were very knowledgeable about the Lebanese situation. That might include CIA, State, Defense, Brookings, AEI.

Q: AEI is?

COHEN: American Enterprise Institute, which is sort of a moderate conservative think tank. Sometimes I would talk to people of more extreme views-left and right-to know what kind of questions we'd encounter on the floor and at press conferences. And sometimes retired people who had served there- -Foreign Service officers, former ambassadors.

Q: A bit of networking, then.

COHEN: Oh, of course. Of course. For example, on Vietnam, there's a professor at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, Bob Tucker, who was one of my first contacts on Vietnam when we came here, and he was a hawk. I thought he was the smartest hawk and made the best arguments of any hawk I was talking to. And so when I would come up with a dovish position for Senator Percy-if Tucker was in Baltimore-I would call and ask him when he was going to be down or would he come down or could I go up there, we'll have lunch or talk in his office and so forth so I could just run the idea by him. I didn't say it was something Percy was going to do, but that I've been thinking about this and so forth. And he would give me strong arguments, and sometimes I couldn't respond to those arguments. And sometimes I would drop a certain feature of the idea, because I didn't think it stood up against a really smart guy. And I was much better prepared to either withdraw it or to improve it or to stick with it.

Q: Well, this really points out the fact-I'll use the term that "Washington" is the Greater Washington Area-is loaded with expertise all over the place, which is very easy to tap and is being tapped. But this is something that I don't think is often realized. We'll use the foreign policy aspects. There are people going out there all the time, both through the academic community, the foundations and all. Because everybody is used to being in and out, so it's a great huge brother/sisterhood of knowledge.

COHEN: Sure, in my own work now, although I'm outside the government, I deal with foreign affairs. And in addition to maintaining contacts within the government, I still talk to people like Bob McCloskey and Hal Saunders and Kempton Jenkins and so forth, people I respect, because they keep up with things. They're networking all the time, too, and their views are still very valid, whether one accepts them or not.

Q: On this very informative note, I'd like to thank you very much.

COHEN: Thank you.

End of interview